

March 30, 2022

FINANCE, REVENUE & BONDING COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

SB 485: AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS TO INTERDISTRICT MAGNET SCHOOLS OPERATED BY THE CAPITOL REGION EDUCATION COUNCIL

Testimony from Greg J. Florio, Ed.D., Executive Director of CREC

Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlon, Honorable Ranking Members, and distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee. I am Greg Florio, Executive Director of the [Capitol Region Education Council](#) (CREC), which is a Regional Educational Service Center (RESC). For over 20 years, CREC has worked closely with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and Sheff v. O'Neill Plaintiffs in supporting integrated education through our [18 magnet schools](#) and overseeing the [Hartford Region Open Choice Program](#).

Thank you for raising SB 485, which authorizes the issuance of bond funds and formalizes the planning and state funding mechanism for CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS OF CREC MAGNETS. This bill is critical in helping CREC to properly maintain the Sheff magnet schools that we manage on behalf of the state.

To support the state's obligations for Sheff v. O'Neill, CSDE asked CREC to create a school system with 18 magnet schools; however, as a RESC, CREC does not have bonding authority for capital improvements as available to a traditional school district. Currently, five of the 18 CREC-operated magnet schools are over 20 years old and are in need of capital improvements beginning next year.

In the past few years, we have had to make capital improvements to sidewalks, HVAC systems, parking lots, carpeting, gym floors and playgrounds. Because we have no mechanism for raising capital funds, the funds used for this purpose come directly from the magnet schools' budgets. That means dollars that are much needed for instruction and supportive services to students must instead be used for capital improvements.

Using the same mechanism as the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System ([Sec. 10-95i](#)), we would provide a five-year plan of capital improvement priorities and goals for the CREC-operated magnet schools while maintaining a three year rolling capital improvement and equipment plan for alterations, renovations and repairs. CREC would follow the same or similar planning and approval process, as determined by the appropriate state entities in conjunction with the State Department of Education.

CREC currently has several priority projects that need to be initiated in 2023. Some of these projects are outlined below and include HVAC, flooring, window and green energy projects, such as repairing or replacing solar/photovoltaic systems with an estimated total of \$17M in the next five years. Without a mechanism to cover these capital improvement expenses, CREC would need to use dollars designated for instructional purposes and increase tuition costs to school districts. The burden of Sheff magnet capital improvements should be the responsibility of the state and not the local school districts.

Priority Capital Improvement Projects for CREC Magnet Schools beginning in 2023:				
School(s)	Year Built	Location	Project Examples	Estimated Cost as of March 2022
Metropolitan Learning Center (MLC)	2000	Bloomfield	HVAC, Flooring, Windows & Painting	\$6,380,000
University of Hartford Magnet (UHMS)	2000	Hartford	Flooring	\$600,000
Two Rivers Magnet Middle (TRMM)	2000	East Hartford	Flooring & Windows	\$650,000
Montessori Magnet School	2000	Hartford	Flooring & Windows	\$500,000
Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts (GHAA) & Theatre, MLC, TRMM & UHMS	2000	Hartford, Bloomfield, East Hartford & West Hartford	Roofing	\$8,300,000
Aerospace, Ana Grace, Academy of Science & Innovation, Civic Leadership, Discovery, International Magnet School, MLC, Museum, Reggio, TRMM, & UHMS	2000-2021	Windsor, Rocky Hill, Bloomfield, Enfield, Glastonbury, South Windsor, Avon, East Hartford & West Hartford	<i>Green Energy Projects:</i> repairing or replacing solar/photovoltaic systems	\$300,000

CREC cannot apply for School Construction Grants for the projects because they are ineligible within the School Construction Grant requirements and would require A *Renovate as New* grant, which would be more costly since it necessitates items to be added to the scope.

CREC Magnet School students deserve their schools to be maintained and to remain safe while receiving a high quality education. **Please support SB 485 and help us by creating this important mechanism to cover our capital improvements without adding another financial burden on our local school districts.**

For more information: [CREC Legislative Priorities 2022](#)

Email: gflorio@crec.org